



Ask A Nurse

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Got a question about your pregnancy?

Click "Contact Us" above and address your request to *Dear Dena* in the subject line. We'll respond by e-mail. We may also post your question here, without using your name, of course.

Dear Dena,

My doctor says I am 23 weeks pregnant. What does that mean? My friends and I want to know how many months along I am.

Signed,
Confused

Dear Confused,

In medical terms, a pregnancy is 40 weeks long counting from the first day of the last normal menstrual period. We count from the last menstrual period because women can tell us about their periods but most cannot know exactly when they conceived. When we count from the last menstrual period, we include approximately two weeks (the time from the period to ovulation/conception) that you are not pregnant. So your doctor is telling you that you are 23 weeks from your last menstrual period. Your doctor knows that you will be due when you are 40 weeks from your last menstrual period. But, how do you translate all that into months?

First you cannot divide the number of weeks by four weeks because our months do not have 28 days (exactly four weeks) in them. So what should you do? Try this. Your doctor has established your due date. Let's say you are due Dec. 21, 2006. On that day, you are nine completed months pregnant and should deliver soon. So, on November 21st, you are eight months; on October 21st, you are seven months; on September 21st, you are six months and so on back to the current date. Remember, you cannot call yourself six months until you have completed the month, which in our example, is September 21st. So on September 7th, you could call yourself five and a half months.

Another way to look at weeks vs. months is to remember that there are 13 1/3 (one-third) weeks in three months, 26 2/3 (two-thirds) weeks in six months, and 40 weeks in nine months. Using this information you could say that your 23 weeks means that you are three to four weeks shy of being six months, which most of your friends will interpret as being five months and that is just about right.

Hope this helps end the confusion.

Dear Dena,

Help! Am I losing my mind? I am 4 months pregnant and I am craving car tires! I mean, I want to chew on a piece of an old tire. I have not done it, but I just have this feeling it would taste good and feel wonderful in my mouth. I haven't told my nurse because I'm afraid she'll think I'm crazy. What's wrong with me?

Signed,
Bizarre Craving

Dear Bizarre,

You are not losing your mind. What you are experiencing is called pica. It means craving nonfood items. We don't know why women experience pica. It may be hormone-related. In some cultures, it is a learned habit passed on from generation to generation. Other nonfood items that women have reported craving include clay, dirt, cigarette ashes, and laundry starch. Corn starch (thickening agent for sauces), not normally eaten directly from the box, has also been reported. Some women have an inordinate craving for ice. I am sure there are others. The important thing is that you do not act on these cravings as they can be harmful to your health. Whether a pregnant woman experiences pica or craves a particular food item to excess, she should talk with her nurse or doctor about it. They will understand completely and their support will make you feel better.